

James B Russell
Williamson County (Texas) Emergency Coordinator
Amateur Radio Emergency Service
1211 Deepwoods Trail
Leander TX 78641

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Federal Communications Commission
425 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20065

Re: Proceeding 06-119 - Impact of Katrina on Communications Systems

To the Commission:

Emergency Communications is an essential part of the response to any disaster. The bigger the disaster, the more likely that existing communications infrastructure will be damaged or possibly completely disrupted.

Planning and preparation for providing back up emergency communications is an on-going need. Our group engages in year round planning and training to be able to respond when needed.

The aftermath of both Katrina and Rita showed just how fragile our modern technology can be. When it works, it is wonderful and I use it every day. At the same time, I also exercise my amateur radio equipment on a regular basis for both personal use, and for preparation to support the community's needs during an emergency situation.

The Amateur Radio Service has a large number of benefits in a backup communication plan. First, amateur radio operators are trained professionals at their hobby. They are not only trained in electronic and radio technology, but also as trained message handlers and tactical communicators. They know how to pick up the pieces when all else fails. In this context, the title "amateur" is misleading (just as misleading as calling a "volunteer fireman" and untrained fire hound). We are amateurs only in the sense that we are unpaid.

Amateur Radio also has a variety of different modes and frequencies to support its mission. The service has frequencies from 1.8MHz all the way to 300Ghz as well as modes like FM, SSB, AM, CW, Packet, Pactor, PSK31, and much more. These technologies can support slow scan television, radio-based e-mail, tactical voice, and anything else that emergency managers need to communicate.

The most impressive thing the most note about amateur radio is their passion to serve the community. Amateur operators spend their own time and money to support a backup communication infrastructure. Just this should be an alert to the governing bodies to work with these professionals to make their jobs easier.

While not specifically noted in the NPRM, we need much more realistic and useful frequency limitations, particularly for digital modes. Band use planning should be by bandwidth, not by mode. The ability to send messages in a standardized e-mail format using modern day modes such as Pactor I, II, and III on HF is much more efficient then other modes in operation. Having the ability to use radio based e-mail technology supports emergency management agencies and other customers during events like Katrina. These modes were used during the Katrina disaster but were limited due to band use regulations. Having additional bandwidth areas will allow semi-automated digital systems like these to operate.

I personally used digital techniques (specifically Winlink 2000 on HF) to communicate food deliveries and other operational messages during the aftermath of Rita and can attest to its value.

Another issue that should be addressed is some form of recognized credentialing for amateur operators. As it is, our local ID's are recognized and we work with the various government and private agencies here for identification of our members, but this is of little use when we may be deployed anywhere for relief support. Amateurs traveled across the country to support the Katrina efforts. It is impossible to provide short term identification during an emergency when all sorts of other things are going on.

Respectfully Submitted,

James B. Russell
Emergency Coordinator
A.R.E.S. Williamson County (Texas)